

STATE LIBRARY OF PENNSYLVANIA  
docs.pa PY H673.19/5 P933  
Preserving Pennsylvania's heri



0 0001 00194780 1

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2017 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

P 933

1250

PENNSYLVANIA STATE LIBRARY

General Library Bureau







# Preserving Pennsylvania's Historical Heritage Photographically

*by*

DONALD H. KENT

*Reprinted from PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY, Quarterly Journal of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, Vol. XVII, No. 4, October, 1950, for the PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION.*





# PRESERVING PENNSYLVANIA'S HISTORICAL HERITAGE PHOTOGRAPHICALLY\*

BY DONALD H. KENT

IN THE past few years, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has been engaged in an extensive program of microfilming and photostating, in order to gather together in Harrisburg the scattered resources for Pennsylvania history, wherever they might be found. With the use of the two modern photographic developments, the microfilm and the photostat, it has been possible to build up a really outstanding collection of facsimile copies of historical manuscripts, early newspapers, and important maps. Financially, the work was made possible by the first appropriations ever made by the General Assembly specifically for historical research work by the Commission. The appropriations of 1947 and 1949 were the first to allocate money for a broad research program. The microfilming or historical collection program was only one part of this general research program. A large part of the money was used for publications, for subsidies to encourage historical research, and for special projects. A great deal was accomplished in all the phases of the program, but the microfilms of historical collections will be of lasting and permanent value. The results achieved are out of all proportion to the cost in money. After all the publications have been distributed, after all the research projects have been completed and published, the microfilm collections will still be in use, and will still be revealing significant data to historical students. So great is the volume of material that it will take a long period of years before it can be assimilated and worked into the general body of the historical literature of Pennsylvania.

To have copied so much material by hand or by typewriter would have been an almost impossible task, and a long and ex-

\*A paper read before the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies, Harrisburg, May 3, 1950.

pensive one. To cite one parallel example, the Public Archives of Canada has been carrying on just such an undertaking for more than seventy years. The important sources for Canadian history have been copied by hand in the various depositories of France and Great Britain. Such a method involves a tremendous expenditure of time and money. Public interest in historical work must be sustained over a long period of time. What is more, it is difficult to assure complete accuracy in the hand copies, even with the most careful checking. The Commission's program has been in existence for less than four years. I should not venture to say that the Commission collections now equal the great transcript collections in Ottawa, but it is safe to say that we are far along the road to matching them.

The microfilm and the photostat have made it possible to copy an immense quantity of source material at relatively small cost. The photographic copies reproduce the originals exactly; sometimes they are actually clearer and easier to read than the originals. There is no problem of accuracy, if the photographic work is properly done.

Another advantage of microfilm is that it saves a great deal of space. More than a thousand pages of material can be photographed on a single hundred-foot reel of film. We have almost a million pages of source material in two special cabinets no larger than ordinary office filing cabinets.

In size and appearance, microfilm resembles ordinary moving picture film. A non-inflammable safety film stock is used, and the light-sensitive silver particles must be extremely fine-grained in order to permit clear enlargement. Proper handling, proper photographic techniques, and careful development are essential if satisfactory and lasting results are to be obtained. It is probably better to have the work done by an experienced and reliable microfilm concern rather than to purchase a microfilm camera and attempt to do such work, unless a skilled photographer is on hand.

Historically-minded people have long realized the importance of duplicating and multiplying copies of historical records, both for use and for preservation. Thus, Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1791 that when such records were lost, they could never be restored; but that what remains should be preserved, "not by vaults and locks which fence them from the public eye and use . . . , but

by such a multiplication of copies as shall place them beyond the reach of accident." He was thinking of printing. This idea of preservation by multiplying copies was one of the motives for the great series of publications of source materials in the nineteenth century. Such publications as Peter Force's *American Archives*, and our own *Colonial Records* and *Pennsylvania Archives*, are examples of the multiplication of copies of source materials by printing. Obviously this is a very expensive way of preserving source material. It is worthwhile only when the sources are of great importance and when they will be used by many people.

Another and equally important reason for copying historical materials is to make them available to scholars and research workers. To the ordinary historical worker it is often tantalizing to know from calendars or catalogues that the basic sources for his topic of study are scattered not only throughout Pennsylvania, but also from Canada to California. Such a situation is likely to occur with respect to almost any topic of study in Pennsylvania history. Unless he is a man of means, a circumstance which is all too rare, the student will have to do without the sources in far distant places, or to rely on correspondence, which is at best unsatisfactory. His work will be to that extent incomplete.

By its microfilming program, the Commission is endeavoring to bring together in Harrisburg all the important sources for the history of the state which are in distant archives and libraries. Except for a few special collections which are restricted, the microfilms are available for use by any qualified research student. Arrangements can even be made to borrow them for outside use, where a microfilm reader is available.

The first step in this microfilming work was, of course, the making of a first-hand survey of the materials in the various depositories. When possible, we would consult such catalogues or finding lists as had been published, or would try to learn by correspondence whether a given depository had important source material for Pennsylvania history. Then, Dr. S. K. Stevens, the State Historian, or I, or both of us, would visit the depository and make a thorough examination of its collections. If card catalogues or card indexes were available, we would check through them carefully. Then, we would look at the actual source material

and would make a list of the items related to Pennsylvania. Often there was a real advantage in working as a team, rather than alone, for it was a great help for us to be able to discuss the significance of the various letters found, and to decide what should be listed for filming.

Mr. Norman Wilkinson, Assistant State Historian, and Dr. Hubertis Cummings, special consultant, have also made such surveys, especially for material in their respective fields of land companies and transportation history. Mrs. Autumn Leonard, research assistant, has also gone a-hunting for material for the Papers of Henry Bouquet, particularly in Virginia and Maryland depositories, in the Library of Congress, and in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. She has been active also in the search for manuscripts and early newspapers in private hands.

Since I am mentioning names here, I should also mention the fact that Mr. Henry Eddy and his Public Records Division have been co-operating very closely with the Historical Division in its microfilm program. Mr. William Hunter, the Senior Archivist, has helped to locate source material in and around Mercer County. Mrs. Martha Curtis, the Junior Archivist, has been making a thorough study of our microfilm collections, in order to work out a practical system of cataloguing and indexing the material. Last year, Mrs. Curtis spent a month at the National Archives studying the microfilming techniques and methods which are in use there. Therefore, the co-operation of the Public Records Division of the Commission has been of very great assistance to the micro-filming program.

The list of out-of-state depositories which has been surveyed is a long one. It may add to the interest of the list if it is realized that the Commission now has microfilms or photostats of important Pennsylvania sources from almost all the institutions mentioned.

New York Public Library  
New York Historical Society  
William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.  
Detroit Public Library  
Indiana State Historical Society  
Chicago Historical Society

Newberry Library, Chicago  
 University of Chicago Library  
 University of Michigan Library  
 Cornell University Library  
 Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa  
 Archives of the Seminary of Quebec, Laval University  
 Archives of the Province of Quebec  
 Montreal Municipal Library  
 College Sainte-Marie, Montreal  
 University of Montreal Library  
 Archives of the District of Montreal  
 Huntington Library and Art Gallery, Pasadena, Calif.  
 Colorado State Archives  
 Office of the Church Historian of the Mormon Church  
 Oregon Historical Society  
 University of Washington Library  
 Massachusetts Historical Society  
 Maryland Historical Society  
 Maryland Hall of Records  
 Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio  
 John Carter Brown Library, Providence, R. I.  
 Virginia State Library  
 Buffalo Historical Society  
 New York State Library  
 New York Bureau of Land Records  
 Wisconsin State Historical Society

In almost all of these depositories some material of importance was found, usually in considerable quantity, occasionally only a few items, but in every case enough to justify the survey. From most of these depositories, we now have all the Pennsylvania source material, either in microfilm or photostat form. In a few cases, microfilm apparatus was not available, or the scattered nature of the material made photostats more satisfactory.

The list is long, but there still remain many out-of-state depositories to be visited before the program for surveying and gathering the scattered source materials for Pennsylvania history can be considered complete. It is not difficult to think of more depositories which should be surveyed. The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society must contain a great deal of significant Pennsylvania material, for the early history of western Pennsylvania is closely knit with the early history of Ohio, and Pennsylvanians contributed a great deal to the early development of that state. The Princeton University Library logically should have



material of interest to Pennsylvania, for that institution has many Pennsylvania connections, and doctoral dissertations related to Pennsylvania history have come from it. The Yale University Library has a Benjamin Franklin collection and a collection on the history of petroleum; there is no telling what else may be found there. The Harvard University Library, and many other New England institutions, would be equally likely to have Pennsylvania sources in their manuscript collections. The list of possibilities could be carried on almost without end.

There is hardly a depository in the United States and Canada which would not be likely to have some material on Pennsylvania history. The reasons for this are a product of Pennsylvania history itself. There is hardly a major event or development in American history in which Pennsylvania did not play an important part, or which did not have some effect upon the course of Pennsylvania history. Pennsylvania statesmen and politicians were important in the councils of the nation and of all political parties; therefore, letters from Pennsylvania leaders may be found almost anywhere. The early history of Canada was related to Pennsylvania history from the time that William Penn, writing to the Indians of his new province, addressed his letter to the Emperor of Canada. Canada and Pennsylvania overlapped until the end of the French and Indian War, and even after, until the end of the War of 1812 removed the possibility that British Canada might expand southward. Many western states were developed largely by Pennsylvanians, as place names testify. The fact that two brothers, John and William Bigler, became governors of Pennsylvania and California in the same year may seem striking and unusual, but it also reflects the interconnection of the history of Pennsylvania with that of other states.

Time does not permit a description of all the surveys and of all the materials which were microfilmed for the Commission. A few examples will be enough to show the significance of this program, the value of the surveys, and the character of the material which is now available in Harrisburg.

In January 1949, Dr. Stevens and I visited the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Here we examined all the American papers of the Earl of Loudoun and Gen. James Abercromby, who were the commanders-in-chief of the British

armies in North America from 1756 to 1758. The Loudoun Papers, ranging from 1754 to 1760, contain many significant letters and documents relating to the Braddock expedition, Pennsylvania's frontier forts, and military operations in Pennsylvania. The Abercromby Papers deal with the year 1758, and have much material on the Forbes expedition. In both collections there are many items related to the Bouquet Papers, so that this material has been of great value in editing this Commission publication, which is now in preparation. Altogether, we examined and looked at every document in 131 boxes of the Loudoun and Abercromby papers, and listed 378 items for microfilming.

With the Amherst Papers from the Library of Congress, the Gage Papers and the Clinton Papers from the William L. Clements Library, and the Monckton Papers from the Public Archives of Canada, the Commission now has on microfilm a complete "run" of British military papers relating to Pennsylvania from 1754 to 1776.

There were also in the Huntington Library a number of manuscripts and printed maps related to Pennsylvania, of which we obtained photostats. Among these were Christopher Gist's sketch map of the Braddock campaign, and John Andre's pen and ink sketches of Revolutionary battles and campaigns.

The Huntington Library had other materials which were obviously of great value to Pennsylvania history, but which could not be filmed because of library regulations. In the case of the Loudoun and Abercromby Papers, and the maps, we could prove that they would be used for definitely-scheduled Commission publications, such as the *Bouquet Papers* and the revision of *Frontier Forts*. For the rest we had to confine our work to the making of a detailed list. This list has been mimeographed, and is in itself of value in showing what valuable Pennsylvania material is in existence, three thousand miles away.

There is, for example, a large group of Robert Morris papers, mainly personal in character. Dr. Stevens, who examined them, says that they make Morris much more human than any biography of him which has yet appeared. A great many scattered but important items were also listed in the Miscellaneous Collections. There were, for example, eight letters to or from Richard Peters, twelve Penn documents, and fifty letters of Alexander Dallas.

Perhaps the most unusual and significant collection microfilmed for the Commission was the Contrecoeur Papers, from the Archives of the Seminary of Quebec, at Laval University. These are letters and documents relating to French campaigns in western Pennsylvania, from 1753 to 1756. They form an almost complete series of the correspondence of the commanders of the French expeditions into the Ohio valley. All the chief commanders are represented, including Marin, Péan, St. Pierre, and Contrecoeur. There are many letters of instruction from the Governor, Marquis Duquesne, from the Intendant Bigot, and from their subordinates. In these papers are a great variety of interesting letters and documents. The commanders of the various forts write to one another, and report local developments. Agents among the Indians report their reactions and attitudes, and send copies of council minutes. Governor Duquesne's letter to St. Pierre about Washington's mission to Fort Le Boeuf is among the papers. Here are also extended extracts from Washington's journal of 1754 for the Fort Necessity campaign, which include several passages not in the published text of that diary. There are letters dealing with the Fort Necessity campaign, with Braddock's defeat, with the treatment of Pennsylvania traders, and with raids upon the Pennsylvania frontier. The Contrecoeur Papers are a mine of hitherto unknown information about the French side of the French and Indian War.

Under the terms of the agreement with Laval University for the filming of this material, the use of this microfilm is restricted to the research projects of the Commission. However, with the aid of the Commission, scholars at the University are preparing and editing a selection of the Papers, which will be published in French in Quebec, by the end of this year. After that, it is hoped that the Commission will publish an English translation.

The Commission itself has placed no restrictions upon the use of any of its microfilmed material. In the case of the restricted material, we merely apply the stipulations of the institution which owns the originals. It is obvious that we must carry out the terms of the agreements by which they were filmed. Only a small part of the collections is covered by such restrictions.

Typical of the unrestricted materials, and of their value, are the microfilms from the Buffalo Historical Society, which placed no restriction other than that scholars should mention the original



location of the material. That they would want to do, in any case. The Buffalo collection includes the papers of Daniel Dobbins, the builder of Perry's fleet at Erie, and the papers of his sons. They are not only rich in material on the War of 1812, but also on the early development of trade on the Great Lakes and in northwestern Pennsylvania. Surprisingly enough, the Buffalo Historical Society also had some Penn Papers, which included the accounts of Samuel Carpenter with William Penn for money advanced to him during his trips to Pennsylvania.

The Indiana Historical Society, in Indianapolis, also yielded an abundance of material of interest to Pennsylvania. One would naturally expect to find here material on Anthony Wayne and his campaigns in the Old Northwest, as we did. But, of all things, there were also reports of the British consuls in Philadelphia from 1802 to 1805, and several letters from Simon Cameron.

More letters of Simon Cameron, as well as letters of Governor Curtin, turned up in the New York State Library. Here also we found the early land records of the colony on the Delaware, before William Penn's time. These are but a few examples to show the nature and value of the materials which have been filmed for the Commission.

In general, little attention has been given to surveying or microfilming Pennsylvania material in depositories in or near Pennsylvania. Some materials have been microfilmed or photostated in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and the Library of Congress, when they were needed for definite research projects. But there would be no point in trying to film everything related to Pennsylvania history in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; it would be a sheer impossibility and totally unnecessary. As to the Library of Congress, we have purchased microfilm of the Pennsylvania sections of the Amherst Papers and some source materials needed for the Bouquet Papers, but no attempt has yet been made to survey all of the Pennsylvania material there or in the National Archives.

The microfilming of early newspapers is an important part of this work. Such newspapers, and especially the country weekly newspapers, are a very valuable source for community history. They shed light upon the life and customs of the time, and upon business and social developments. They help to show the community's

reactions and relationship to the movements and developments of national and state history. Very often, the only remaining evidence for important historical developments is to be found in contemporary newspapers. Therefore, it is important to preserve them from loss, and to make them available for historical research.

The holdings of early Pennsylvania newspapers are widely scattered. The valuable files of early newspapers in the State Library and in the historical societies and public libraries of the state are by no means complete. It is seldom that a complete "run" of an early newspaper will be found in any one place. There must be many that remain in private hands.

To give an example, which happens to be familiar to me, the Erie Public Library has an extensive file of the *Erie Weekly Gazette*, a nineteenth century newspaper. This file, however, is not un-broken. Sometimes a whole year or more is missing, sometimes a month, sometimes single issues. Obviously, a historian trying to accumulate data from this newspaper would find frequent breaks in the continuity, and might even miss an important development which had occurred during the gaps. However, we found that the Lehigh University Library had a smaller file of the same newspaper, and that this file covered many of the missing issues. The Commission had both files microfilmed. The Lehigh University film will be used to fill in missing issues in the Erie Library film, with the result that we now have an almost complete "run" of that newspaper. The issues which are still missing may yet be found in private hands.

The Commission's microfilm collection of newspapers is already very extensive. Many newspaper publishers have been aware of the value of their early files, and have microfilmed them, in order to preserve them and save storage space. We have been trying to encourage this, as newspapers are liable to deteriorate from age and use. Whenever possible, positive prints of the microfilms made by these publishers have been purchased for the Commission's collection.

In other cases, important newspaper files were microfilmed directly, when they were found in the possession of individuals or of historical societies and libraries. This was done in order to make our newspaper microfilms fully representative of every region of the state, and especially when there was no prospect that the work

could be done in any other way. Thus, the famous *Crawford Weekly Messenger* of Meadville, and its successors, were filmed from the collections of the Crawford County Historical Society; the *Erie Weekly Gazette* and the *Erie Weekly Observer*, from the Erie Public Library, and other early newspapers from the McKean County Historical Society and the Warren County Historical Society.

Through the interest of Dr. John W. Oliver, Pittsburgh member of the Historical and Museum Commission, the University of Pittsburgh Library is now planning to co-operate in the newspaper microfilming program, so far as the newspapers of western Pennsylvania are concerned. The library is considering the allocation of a considerable sum for the filming of such newspapers.

As a result of the newspaper microfilming program, the Commission now has a representative collection of Pennsylvania newspapers from every region of the state. More than 26 counties and 106 newspapers are represented in the collection. We have long runs of newspapers from thirteen counties, including Allegheny, Berks, Crawford, Delaware, Erie, Fayette, Lycoming, Schuylkill, Venango, Warren, Washington, Westmoreland, and York. The earliest date is December 22, 1719, and the latest date is June 12, 1901.

Besides the survey and the microfilming of Pennsylvania sources in major depositories throughout the country, and the newspaper microfilming, we have also been searching for what might be called the "hidden sources" for local and state history. Scattered throughout Pennsylvania, there are undoubtedly a great many significant historical documents in the hands of private owners. They may be the diaries or letters of individuals. They may be files of rare newspapers, not known to survive in any public depository. They may be business or institutional records, such as are of the greatest importance in the writing of economic and social history. There is seldom a week in which we do not hear of some historical materials in private hands. Judging by the various ways in which we learn of these, there must be much more to be found. Sometimes, an owner will write to ask if what he has is of any value. Sometimes, Dr. Stevens has picked up "leads" as to the existence and location of important material at various meetings where he has spoken on this subject. He reports that there is scarcely a meeting which he

has addressed in recent years, in which some member of his audience did not call attention to important source material.

Often the owners themselves do not appreciate the importance of what they have. The chances that a privately-owned letter or document dealing with a particular topic of Pennsylvania history will come to the attention and knowledge of a historian working on that topic are very, very remote. Some may be tucked away in old boxes and trunks in attics and storerooms; some may be treasured for sentimental reasons by the individuals who own them, and may be brought out upon occasion to show to interested visitors. In any case, their value toward the accumulation of authentic information about Pennsylvania's historic past is virtually lost, unless they can be brought to the attention of historical research workers. The possibility of the loss or destruction of such material in private hands is very great. Conditions of living today are a constant threat to such privately owned material. People move more frequently, and just do not bother to take along the old box of newspapers in the attic. Large nineteenth-century homes are cut up into apartments, and there is no room to keep the old letters and papers that grandfather accumulated. There is no telling how much was destroyed during the scrap paper drives of the war years.

There must be a steady and persistent campaign to call attention to the importance of such source material. This the Commission has been trying to do. Dr. Stevens has sent out a number of newspaper releases on the subject, and has addressed a general letter to all the historical societies to enlist their co-operation. It was as a result of this letter that he discovered the remarkable John Hays diary, dealing with the journey of Christian Frederick Post and John Hays among the northern Pennsylvania Indians in 1760. This was in the possession of Mrs. Sylvia B. Hays, former secretary of the Lycoming Historical Society. Most of Dr. Stevens' recent addresses to historical societies and service groups have emphasized this search for Pennsylvania sources in private hands.

The Commission has been trying to uncover these hidden source materials, in order to microfilm and bring them to Harrisburg as part of the collection of sources for Pennsylvania history. This greatly reduces the chances that they will be lost or destroyed. Once the material is on microfilm in the Commission's collection,

it becomes generally available to historians. It is in a place where they would naturally come to look for it.

The task of uncovering these hidden source materials is relatively more difficult and more time-consuming than the work in the large depositories. We have to depend on the co-operation of historical societies and on the gradual education of the public as to the significance of such material. After the material is located, we also have to cultivate the good will of the individual owners, in order to get their permission to make photographs. In assisting in this, the historical societies and their members can render a really great service to Pennsylvania historical work. A concerted effort on their part to locate such materials in their communities would undoubtedly bring a great deal more material to light. Where we now hear of such material in roundabout ways, a little at a time, we could then with the aid of the societies expand the microfilming of the hidden sources to the point where it would be the most important part of the Commission's microfilming program.











